

A Meeting of Men(?) on a Certain Day

After Japan's Campione spent New Year's in the South Seas, almost half a month had passed.

Just as mid-January was about to arrive, Sayanomiya Kaoru made a visit to the "Peerless Statesman" maid cafe. As soon as she had settled in her seat, she extended an invitation to the two others seated at the table.

"If you're free, would you like to spend the upcoming Valentine's Day together with me?"

" "....." "

Lu Yinghua and Amakasu Touma both responded with silence to this sudden invitation.

They were currently occupying the VIP room in the depths of the shop. This was a special room which was even equipped with a billiards table, darts and a card game table. Its level of luxury completely did not belong in a maid cafe in Akihabara.

After a brief while, Amakasu spoke up.

"With confidence and hope, let me ask this question first. The purpose of this invitation isn't to give us chocolate, is it? On the off chance that it might be the case, please allow me to decline with utmost perseverance."

"Yeah, hanging with you Sayanomiya-niisan, it's enough to make one go mad."

"You two seem to have ignored my gender magnificently."

Watching even someone like Lu Yinghua overcome with frowns, Kaoru smiled wryly on her androgynous and beautiful face.

Her handsome features seemed neither male nor female. The closest description would be that of an androgynous Adonis who appeared in shoujo manga in the olden days. Nevertheless, Kaoru's gender was certifiably female, and she was even a Hime-Miko as well.

As a side note, today she was dressed in a men's jacket and slacks.

"Just as you speculated, I wish for you two to accept my chocolate. These could be said to be my feelings, or more accurately, the feelings of a great number of girls."

"Unwittingly, you've leaked a rather suspicious matter..."

In response to Amakasu's mutterings, Kaoru smiled with delight and continued:

"Just as you already know, I am a third year high school student who is about to graduate to university. Furthermore, I am adored by all the female students in the school, including the student council president."

"Hey Nii-san, are you even studying seriously in high school?"

"Surprising as it may seem, she does go to school. A certain prestigious all-girls school. After spending three years in high school, wearing a specially tailored uniform, she has even gone so far as to become the idol of all the students and the female teachers."

Prompted by Yinghua, Amakasu explained in a shocked tone of voice.

Seeing the conversation take a turn in this direction so quickly, Kaoru smiled cordially and began to bring up the main point.

"Yes. Well then, it is predicted that the number of female students and older ladies giving chocolate to the departing Sayanomiya Kaoru will rise threefold compared to last year. I have already started receiving quite a number of presents given in advance. So this year, I'd like to have a more ideal system for receiving the influx of chocolate."

"In other words, you want us to help out?"

"A great answer, Amakasu-san! Lu-kun, I will require the use of these premises on February 14. I will set aside a fraction of this courtesy chocolate to be processed into a cake for everyone as my present."

"Well, provided it doesn't interfere with promotional activities on Valentine's Day, I don't really mind."

"What do you intend to do with the remaining fraction?"

"Donate the chocolate to places where there are many children and keep my personal favorites. There're various ways to deal with it. Prior preparations are already underway in this area."

"As usual, you're not using your talents on proper work..."

Amakasu sighed in response to his boss' flawless preparations.

Winking at her loyal and obedient subordinate, Kaoru continued.

"Besides, this gathering is men only. Girls are forbidden to join. I also plan on inviting members of the History Compilation Committee and certain bachelors that I know."

"So, you're going to invite Honored Uncle too?"

"Kusanagi-san? He'd probably accept with relief if I were to invite him."

"Because he is the type who can only relax in the company of men. But if Kusanagi-san were to come here, there will be a lot of grumbling from various sources."

Kusanagi Godou was the Campione who resided in Japan. Kaoru smiled wryly as she mentioned his name.

"We'll just have to come up with countermeasures when the time comes. After all, inviting Kusanagi-san here will be very interesting."

"Please don't dupe the world's great Devil King just for fun. This is our domestic godslayer after all, the unprecedented debuting Campione whose identity no one could have predicted until last spring."

Amakasu warned as if completely drained in energy.

"Prior to a year ago, the Witenagemot had never reported any Campiones leaving their mark on Japan."

"Oh yeah, is that the thing that gets delivered from England every month?"

As a Hong Kong martial artist, Lu Yinghua was not very well acquainted in these matters and expressed his puzzlement.

"Yes. Once interested parties are registered as members, they can receive regular reports about Campiones and research materials if they wish."

"It's also become quite convenient to read this kind of stuff on the net nowadays."

As soon as Kaoru spoke, Amakasu took out a tablet terminal.

"See, all sorts of things are recorded here."

"...What is this? There's nothing shocking in there at all."

This was an English website restricted only to members. After briefly browsing through the contents on the tablet handed over to him, Lu Yinghua shrugged. Amakasu and Kaoru smiled wryly in response.

"Well of course, the disciple of the most deadly Campione would simply dismiss this level of information with a snort of laughter."

"There are some detailed descriptions about the new generation's quartet."

Alexandre Gascoigne. John Pluto Smith.

Salvatore Doni. And Kusanagi Godou.

Among the seven Campiones, they were the quartet known as the new generation. Apart from the one living in Los Angeles whose age was unknown, they were all youngsters ranging from teens to their twenties.

In particular, information regarding Black Prince Alec was especially detailed.

The five authorities he possessed—divine speed, vengeance, the labyrinth, the gravity sphere and the servant that could not be seen. His peculiar personality. And also the various incidents and atrocities he committed incessantly.

The vast majority of records were authored by Princess Alice, the White Princess who stood as the Black Prince's longstanding adversary.

There were also collections of eyewitness accounts of John Pluto Smith's transformations and the like.

The demonic deity Tezcatlipoca's giant form as the [Obsidian Shaman]. The black Panthera feline, the [Jaguar]. The [Sun]'s symbolic manifestation, the [Flames of Annihilation]. The demonic bird ruling over the [Wind of Destruction]. These were reportedly the [Smoking One]'s various manifestations resulting from the offering of sacrifices...

"Sir Salvatore and Honored Uncle's information seems quite basic in comparison. I think a lot more can be written by this point."

"Oh, that's probably intentional."

"This information seems to be purposely written to avoid giving the reader the impression that 'Campiones actually have weaknesses.' It's probably a

deliberate omission of information such as the usage conditions of Kusanagi-san's authority or the excessively childish character of Sir Salvatore."

"What should I say, this way of doing things is really..."

"This is to prevent people from picking fights with Campiones on whim or something like that. It couldn't go well anyway."

"Yeah, that's quite true indeed."

Yinghua smiled grimly in response to Amakasu's speculation.

"There really do exist many idiots in this world who would get the wrong idea from this type of information."

"By the way, Lu-kun, has the thought of making a move on Kusanagi-san in a moment of vulnerability ever occurred to you? Given how well you know him, you must have plenty of opportunities to act, right?"

"What nonsense are you suggesting? Trying to target these moments of vulnerability would be like committing suicide."

In the face of Kaoru's impish chuckling, the martial realm's promising young star remained unfazed.

"Even if there are openings to be taken advantage of or weaknesses one could exploit, don't forget that these are people who overcame impossible odds through sheer brutish will alone. Don't go calling this overkill, but I doubt even a missile would work. Besides, I'm not prepared for the challenge of committing suicide together with all of Tokyo."

"Yes, indeed that is the inevitable outcome."

Speaking as if summing up, Amakasu then turned his gaze to the writings displayed on the tablet.

"Anyway, in the elders group, there's really not much written apart from records of Marquis Voban."

"Speaking of the Marquis' information, it does make a note that the theory of slaying Fenrir 'is actually mistaken.' Also, didn't Yuri express her doubts last time regarding the slaying of Balor?"

"Based on the images Yuri reported, it feels like the ancient Roman hero and one-eyed war god, Horatius Cocles."^[1]

The trio of Marquis Voban, Her Eminence Luo Hao and Madame Aisha were considered the Campiones of olden days.

They were already active before Greenwich's Witenagemot had accumulated sufficient power and influence. In particular, the two female members had gradually stopped making public appearances, therefore resulting in less information about them.

Kaoru spoke up while smiling wryly.

"I don't suppose the Witenagemot withheld the "truth" as result of enlightenment by the Campiones' "threat level," did they?"

"It would surely be a wise move on their part. Were my master to find out her information was on the net, she'd probably issue orders to completely destroy all computers existing in the world. Moreover, she'd probably put her grand fists to task, reducing the internet to a relic of a past age."

"You don't sound like you're joking at all."

"This is no joke but solid truth."

The casual conversation turned to the Devil Kings, the Campiones.

Given the trio's identities, it came as no surprise that the topic naturally shifted towards matters in these circles.

"Reading this over again, there's even fewer reports on Madame Aisha than Her Eminence."

"Virtually nothing is known about her apart from the fact that she has withdrawn from the public eye."

"Ah yes, that person huh..."

"Oh dear, Lu-kun, could it be possible that you actually know things about this mysterious female Devil King?"

"I suppose you could say that. But there are many things in this world which are better left unknown. It's not something happy to talk about."

"I see. I guess it's another person belonging to that group."

"When one needs to adhere to prescribed courses of action even for things like this, what kind of suffering has this world come to?"



Ignoring the two History Compilation Committee members' laments, Lu Yinghua operated the touchscreen to display the section for [Cult Leader Luo Hao].

"Age, gender, birthplace, appearance—all 'NO DATA' huh? Yes, I guess this might be enough to guarantee personal safety... Oh wait a minute, one must be insane to write this sort of thing here."

"Is something wrong, Lu-kun?"

"Not just wrong, this will lead to a massacre. Look here, to think someone would dare apply their own labels onto Master's authorities."

Lu Yinghua pointed to a passage of text.

This section recorded Cult Leader Luo Hao's use of the [Divine Might of Vajrapani]. The information collected by the Witenagemot was organized into categories with the key points summarized.

The passage concluded with "This ability is hereby named [The Power]."

"It is customary for the Witenagemot to come up with provisional names for the authorities held by the various Campiones..."

"That's fine for other Devil Kings, but Master has already bestowed proper names for her own authorities."

"So those divine might something or other and whatever howl are names she came up with herself!?"

"Master is not going to allow revisions to these names. The people who wrote this could very well lose their lives."

"Why hasn't Her Eminence's subordinates reported this back to her?"

"That's only natural. The person who reports this kind of news to Master will be the first one to face her wrath. I'm definitely not doing it. But then again, someone might accidentally let slip from their mouth..."

"What an unexpected time bomb that could blow any time..."

"The problem is when the news might reach Her Eminence's ears..."

Learning of this bad news, Kaoru and Amakasu murmured together.

"By the way, Lu-kun, compared to Marquis Voban's authorities, it seems like Her Eminence's authorities number much fewer. Is there any particular reason for that?"

"Well, that's merely an illusion."

Yinghua answered Kaoru's query with a bored expression.

"It only appears that way because Master only used very few authorities in Japan last time. In actual fact, Master possesses all sorts of terrifying powers rivaling Marquis Voban."

"Terrifying powers?"

"For example, there's an ability that improves the fortune of the city she is residing in, resulting in rapid development, or one that could turn the entire world into something like a field of flowers."

"A field of flowers?"

"The first would produce immense economic and political consequences, but is your second example really that dangerous?"

"Based on your description just now, it seems to be an authority that causes flowers to bloom on dead trees?"

"It's not simply dead trees. Flowers can bloom from anything including stones and concrete, burying all the streets completely. Furthermore, these

are no ordinary pretty flowers but could go as far as to produce poisonous flowers and man-eating plants."

"Woah. Not only will it result in the total paralysis of traffic, but also a realm of decay where streets are filled with dead people."

"Even without express intent, Master would subconsciously cause little flowers to sprout on occasion."

"So how broad in range can this deadly field of flowers extend?"

"If Master were to get serious and devote time to it, she could probably cover up all the islands of Japan? Besides, none of the Devil Kings place too much emphasis on the number of authorities. After all, this is not a decisive factor in victory."

Yinghua's knowing look caused Kaoru to turn her gaze towards him while going "Oh really?"

"But I believe that having a range of different abilities allows one to react effectively against all sorts of opponents. Rather, I should say it helps eliminate weaknesses."

"Having a tough time against a poorly compatible enemy can be considered a staple of battle."

Rather than responding to Kaoru's question, Yinghua's wise words seemed to imply he was enjoying a battle of wits instead.

On the other hand, Amakasu interjected with his irresponsibly frivolous tone of voice as always.

Thus he spoke to Lu Yinghua:

"Well, because they are the type to use whatever is at their disposal without regard. Although they will make effective use of their powers no matter how many or few they have, having more does improve the odds when the time comes."

Amakasu discussed the matter of god-slaying Devil Kings with a slightly gloomy gaze.

"However, I don't really think these people actually care about whether their compatibility against their enemy is good or bad, or whether their

opponent is stronger than them or not. Besides, most gods are stronger than the Campiones."

Yinghua stood up and spoke with a tired tone of voice.

"Although my master is unparalleled in the human realm, there exist tons of war gods whose martial arts surpass her. Magic is also nothing but little tricks in front of the divine powers of gods... Someone who keeps worrying about the strength of enemies are just not cut out to become a godslayer. Should an opportunity arise, let's ask Honored Uncle himself."

Leaving these words behind, the young master of Hong Kong's Lu family left the shop.

Always busy, he apparently had various things to do afterwards.

"Kusanagi-san, do you ever care if your enemy is strong or weak?"

"Of course I would. After all, if a battle is unavoidable, of course a weaker opponent would be better."

Roughly thirty minutes had passed after Lu Yinghua's departure.

Kaoru posed the question to Godou who had arrived at the shop as if substituting for Lu Yinghua's absence.

After giving an answer that contradicted the demonic cult leader's direct disciple's assertions, the seventh Campione began to grumble.



"But for some strange reason, I keep encountering enemies who are stronger than me."

"Hey, Kusanagi-san. If that's the case, couldn't you choose to not fight those kinds of enemies?"

The one who interjected was Amakasu.

"This isn't the legend of Miyamoto Musashi. I would rather fight only enemies who are weaker than I am."^[2]

"That's very true, but then again, well, even if the enemy turns out to be stronger than me, it's not like I will absolutely lose for sure. So I guess the distinction isn't that important."

" "....." "

"Eh? What's the matter?"

Godou was puzzled to see Kaoru and Amakasu exchanging glances.

"Ah, it's nothing. Just a feeling of verified speculation, that's all."

"For a normal person, the distinction is quite an important one. But for you to give this kind of answer, it is truly worthy of the great Devil King."

As the boss smiled wryly, the subordinate shrugged with an expression of feigned innocence.

On the other hand, Godou stared blankly, completely baffled by the question's purpose.

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References

1. ↑ Horatius Cocles: Publius Horatius Cocles was an army officer of the ancient Roman Republic, famous during the war between Rome and Clusium during the 6th century BCE.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatius_Cocles
2. ↑ Miyamoto Musashi(宮本 武蔵): a Japanese swordsman renowned for his excellent swordsmanship in numerous duels since a very young age.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miyamoto_Musashi

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